

*Benevolence the genuine characteristic of
Christianity.*

A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the
ANNIVERSARY MEETING
OF THE
GOVERNORS and CONTRIBUTORS
TO THE

Devon and Exeter Hospital,

At ST. PETER'S, EXON,

On Tuesday the 29th of *August*, 1758.

By *JAMES CARRINGTON*, M. A.
Chancellor of the Diocese, and Prebendary of the Church
of *Exeter*.

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T O

THOMAS PUTT,
RICHARD INGLETT,
THOMAS NORTHMORE,
SAMUEL KILLETT, } Esqrs.
Mr. RICHARD DENSHAM, and
Mr. JOHN STOODLY,

Stewards of the late Anniverfary Meeting,

And the reft of the

GOVERNORS and CONTRIBUTORS

To this *HOSPITAL*,

THIS DISCOURSE,

Preach'd and publish'd at their Request,

Is, with great Respect, inscrib'd,

B Y

Their very humble Servant,

J. CARRINGTON.



JOHN xiii. 35.

By this shall all men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have love one to another.

TIS a favorite plea of the *Romish* Church, that the excellence of that communion is evidently attested by a continuation of the miraculous powers exerted in the pure and infant ages of Christianity. Of what nature are those miracles on which they found the argument, let their own legends speak for them; where they will be found to be in general such as have a tendency to promote affections very different from veneration and esteem: nor, were they ten times more specious than they are, would they give any tolerable degree of weight to their pretensions, so long as there subsist among them so many evident marks of their having *abandon'd their first love*, and wander'd from the standard, *the faith first deliver'd to the saints*.

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But the plea is in itself idle and trifling; we nowhere find it promis'd that such supernatural powers shall be the indelible characteristics of the true church of Christ: On the contrary, we have all the reason in the world to believe that they have long since subsided; and at least *then*, when the tongue of philosophy, and the arm of the secular power, by espousing the cause, render'd them less necessary to the support of the Christian doctrines, were entirely withdrawn from the church, which from that time God hath thought proper to govern, and direct by the ordinary methods of his providence.

In the mean time there is (very different however from this) one genuine characteristic of the church of Christ, which is not only as certain, and permanent, as they would pretend with regard to the mark of miracles, and which is openly and peremptorily declar'd to be so; but so indispensably necessary that the simple defect of it is enough to overthrow all other favorable appearances whatever, and to stand as a demonstrative argument that the church wherein such a defect is visible, is far from being form'd upon the plan established by Christ and his apostles. This mark is Charity, in the latitude described by St. Paul; where she displays herself in long-suffering, or forbearance, in kindness,
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in friendly sympathy, in modest sentiments with regard to herself, and various other amiable and engaging qualities.— Let him who pretends to the character of a disciple of Christ examine himself in this mirror, and try the validity of his pretensions: this is the true criterion, by which it shall be known whether they are well or ill grounded: as for other tests, they are fallible: prophecies, tongues, inspirations, are not to be depended upon: and though our Lord himself actually promis'd that *these signs should follow* the embracing his doctrines, and the belief in his name, viz. that the converts should in his Name cast out devils, should speak with new tongues, take up serpents, and if they drank any deadly thing it should not hurt them [a]; that by the imposition of their hands on the sick they should restore them to health and soundness; -- yet those high and extraordinary indulgences were to be but temporary and occasional, and perhaps limited with respect to persons; --- prophecies were to fail, tongues were to cease, and knowledge was to vanish away; --- and it was therefore that the apostle was so urgent with the church of Corinth, and indeed with all his converts, to distinguish themselves by a note which would never fail.

[a] Mar. xvi. 18.

We must not wonder that a duty of so high importance, an accomplishment so expressive of, and so essential to, the christian character, should be proportionably extensive: accordingly we find it assuming a variety of shapes, agreeable to every exigency, and as it is beautifully delineated by St. Paul [b], displaying itself in *long suffering*, in *kindness*, and acts of benevolence and humanity; never envying, but enjoying the success, and admiring the excellencies, of all about her; considering human nature as dignified in general by any extraordinary favor, or indulgence granted to individuals; rejoicing with those who have reason to rejoice, and enjoying the godlike satisfaction of being pleased at the felicity of others: remarkable for its humility, and never *vaunting itself*, or being *puffed up* with a vain conceit of the extraordinary excellency of its own natural or acquire'd abilities; never *behaving itself unseemly*, but on all occasions avoiding an indecent and unbecoming arrogance, as well with respect to words as actions; *not seeking even its own*, not promoting its own advantage at all events, but rather postponing its own private interest to public utility. The man who is actuated by this Love *is not easily provoked*, is *slow to wrath*, and never suffers his resentments to rise to an undue and immoderate

[b] I. Cor. xiii. 4. &c.

height; ---

height; --- *thinketh no evil*, never indulges himself in passing harsh and rigid censures, but judges of men and things with candor and good-nature; *rejoiceth not in iniquity* as it may signify either natural or moral evil, but *rejoiceth in the truth*; when all things are rightly conducted, when virtue is esteem'd, and religion flourishes; when there is probity in individuals; mutual affection, good-will and friendship among lesser societies; and harmony, peace, and unanimity in states and nations; *beareth*, or rather, more properly, *covereth*, *all things*; draws a friendly veil over the imperfections of his neighbor, and suppresses every thing which might be matter of confusion, disorder, or ill-will; --- *believeth all things*; all things at least which may not impeach his reason or affect his virtue; --- is not of a timorous, suspicious, or incredulous, disposition; --- *hopeth all things* for the best, and that with regard to all men; for the Good, -- perseverance, and higher degrees of perfection; for the Wicked, -- repentance, amendment, pardon, and acceptance; --- *endureth all things*, the buffets of affliction, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, without going about to increase the evil by retorting it; *requiteth not evil with evil*, but *endeavoreth to overcome evil with good*. Thus open and diffusive is the love which we owe one to another; --- but never does it appear in a

more amiable light, or to greater advantage, than when it is exerted in acts of humanity and benevolence; in relieving the distresses of the afflicted, comforting the widow, and drying up the tears of the fatherless; in feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, redeeming the captive, and administering to the necessities of the sick and wounded: these are godlike employments; *then* is the disciple copying out the pattern of his great master in the brightest parts of the character, when like him he is continually going about and *doing good* wherever opportunity offers; then are we most like both to him and his divine father, when we are *merciful even as they are merciful*. You must give me leave (and indeed the occasion of our meeting here seems to demand it of me) to expatiate a little on this part of brotherly love; and as it is so necessary to enquire how it may be best discharged; what are the requisites to make it complete and perfect, and most conformable to that love which consists *not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth* [c].

To this purpose I must first observe that this *love* must be *without dissimulation* [d]; and he *that giveth* on these occasions *should do it with simplicity* [e]. That love cannot be rightly exerted which is not ex-

[c] 1. Joh. iii. 18.

[d] Rom. xii. 9.

[e] xvi. 8.

erted

erted on just and proper (that is, as I take it, on pious and generous) motives;— such for instance as regard to the commands of the almighty; an high and grateful sense of the love which he hath on so many occasions extended to us; an earnest endeavor to resemble him; a sincere regard to the well-being of our fellow creature, and a *compassionate* ~~enable~~ sense of the distresses we relieve, untemper'd either with the vanity of the hypocrite, who blows a trumpet to call the silly gazing croud about him, that he may gratify his pride with their senseless applause and acclamations; the servility of the flatterer, who sacrifices to the force of fashion, the intreaty of a friend, or the command of a superior; or, lastly, the sordid selfishness of the wretch who gives with the mean and mercenary view of receiving in some shape or other an advantage more than adequate to the sum he expends on the venture. Wherever there is any alloy of these gross and sordid materials it is sufficient to tully the seemingly brightest displays of love, and to deprive it at once of its merit, and of its reward.

It is not enough that we *give with simplicity*, we must also *shew mercy with cheerfulness* [f]: however the interest of the public might be affected by it,

[f] Rom. xii. 8.

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every man should for his own interest, act in this respect according as *he is dispos'd in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a chearful giver* [g]. He loves not the man, whose heart and hand go not together, and who parts with his mite with as much reluctance, as if it were part of the stamina of his life: where a chearful and willing mind are wanting, 'tis to be fear'd that no other motives can compensate for the deficiency. *Let every one do then as he is disposed in his heart*; consult his conscience; the man whose heart is not right, even his alms, as well as his *prayer* may be turned into sin. There is a considerable and essential difference between Beneficence and Benevolence; the latter is the absolute act of the will, the former may possibly be done without her concurrence;--- he who possesses the first alone may be *no better than a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal*;--- whereas by virtue of the latter only a man may make good his claim (for all have it not in their power to be beneficent) to the character of a genuine disciple of the blessed Jesus:--- Beneficence in short may miscarry; Benevolence cannot; for *if there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not* [h]: This is the criterion by which God tries whether our love

[g] II. Cor. ix. 7.

[h] II. Cor. viii. 12.

be sincere; by this the widow's mite was in his sight swollen to a bulk which the costly offerings of the rich could not come up to.

With an ill grace do even favors come from the hand of him whose countenance at the same time tells you that they flow not from an humane and generous principle; where the *cheerful eye* is wanting, the relish of the feast is lost; the food of such an one has not half the agreeable favor, nor feeds half so full; his raiment gives not half the warmth, as those which we receive from one whose hospitable heart is equally express'd in his face and in his table; mercies accompanied with churlish and upbraiding reflections become a kind of cruelties; *these* afflict more than *those* relieve; they create distresses which no external applications can remove, --- a mourning heart, and weeping eye: the *cheerful giver* excites in us all those pleasing emotions, those grateful sensations, which warm, and feed the heart, and conveys at once nourishment to the body, vigor to the limbs, and gaiety to the countenance. Were it my view to excite only a temporary warmth in my auditors in order to engage them to an immediate contribution, I might perhaps have omitted this remark; but as the occasion which brought me hither requires a constant and regular display of chari-

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ty and benevolence, I judge it my duty to endeavor if possible to awaken a principle, which may continually feed, and keep it alive.

In enumerating the qualifications requisite to manifest the sincerity of our love to each other in this respect, I must by no means forget that very essential one bounty, or liberality. Let me not here however be misunderstood, as though I meant to lay a man under the necessity of giving largely to charitable uses, whether it be consistent with his ability or not : there is a charity due to ourselves and our families, which no considerations, either moral or religious, oblige or require us to violate. The general measure of our bounty then is to be the rate or proportion of our ability : The returns are to be made according to our great benefactor's bounty to us ; from him who *hath received much*, much will be expected ; and even he who hath received but little ought as an acknowledgement from whom he hath received, to *do his diligence gladly to give of that little*. 'Tis extremely difficult to ascertain the proportion of a man's fortune which he ought to apply towards the relief of his necessitous brethren ; but thus much is certain, that what he can conveniently spare for that purpose, he has in fact no right to apply otherwise ; especially, as is I presume too generally the case

case with those, who are most deficient in this duty, to make a sacrifice of it to the dæmons of Vanity, and Intemperance, and *to consume it upon his lusts.*

'Tis true the real necessities of men may differ according to their several stations in life; a larger competency may be allow'd in some than in others; but I must beg leave to observe that our appetites are by no means the proper counsellors to be advised with upon this head; they will be apt to tell us that our own necessities are much more extensive than in reality they are; Luxury will set a competency much higher than Nature could pretend to go; and reason as well as religion will inform us that there are many things superfluous, which folly indeed might fancy necessary for her support, and subsistence; but woe unto him who listeneth to the voice of the siren; mistake and error are in her ways, and her paths lead unto destruction: --- perhaps we need to carry the appeal no higher than to our own hearts in order to obtain satisfaction in this respect, and by enquiring what we should desire, or expect to receive, we shall the more readily learn what we ought to bestow.

These qualifications, valuable as they are, will be considerably improv'd, and our love render'd
more.

more complete and beneficial by the addition of a fourth, which is Discretion; which requires to be consider'd in two particulars, viz. with respect to the objects, and what may I think be properly enough call'd the Management of our charities: with regard to the objects we well know there is no one precept either religious or moral more unlimited than those which relate to this duty, insomuch that we are even required to give *to every one who asketh of us*; but besides that few fortunes would be sufficient to answer the demand, in this indolent and importunate age, so indiscrete a liberality might be attended with a variety of inconveniencies; we might impoverish ourselves for the support and propagation of idleness, the certain parent of vice, and by degrees change places with our pensionaries: If on the other hand we are too nice, and scrupulous in this respect, the virtuous and honest poor, who have a right to our assistance, may suffer, and real necessities go unrelieved: the only chance we have of steering between these dangerous shelves with any prospect of safety is to let our discretion at least keep place with the calls for it, and rise in proportion to the difficulties with which it has to struggle.

Perhaps 'tis next to impossible to fix any certain
rule

rule for the distinction of proper objects ; this must be discretionary ; certain however it is in general, that all such as are by nature, or casual misfortunes, become incapacitated for discharging their duties to the community in their respective stations ; or for procuring themselves the honest means of a decent subsistence, are to be consider'd as such : as for those who have not this warrantable plea ; who are yet happy in every requisite necessary to enable them to do that duty for themselves ; whose natural, and acquired abilities are evidently such as may furnish them with the means of subsisting ; who want no art but honesty ; no faculties but industry, and a willing mind, as it is certain that *they* are not proper objects of either beneficence, or benevolence, so were there no other reason why we should not treat them as such, yet it were sufficient that we should thereby render ourselves the less able to assist (and consequently be guilty of a kind of injustice to) those who are.

The conduct of our charities is a point which calls as loudly for our discretion as the choice of objects. Compassion does not more strongly require us to give, than reason, and good policy oblige us to take care that what is given be disposed in such

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method

method, as may be best conducive to the ends, and purposes it was intended to promote.

And here it is undoubtedly the best general rule, which can be laid down, that the good of the community be ever the principal point in view; that nothing be neglected which may promote, and advance *that*; nothing propagated, or encouraged, which may tend to impair or destroy it; thus if for instance it should ever be found that this good should be productive of a superior evil; that our diffusive and unlimited bounties should in a great measure tend to the destruction of industry; and that our pious, and well-intended foundations should become in reality nurseries for pride, for vice, and idleness; we were then in fact greater enemies to the public than our private friendships to individuals would be able to make compensation for; and traitors to our country, by stopping up the channels through which all her advantages must be convey'd, and feeding the flames which must one time, or other inevitably consume, and destroy her. — God forbid that this should ever subsist otherwise than in idea; I cannot however avoid remarking that the apparent decay of industry, and melancholy increase of luxury, which prevails all over the nation, must convince every thinking person, how great a necessity

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ty there is for endeavoring to regulate our benefactions of what kind soever, whether occasional, or on settled foundations, with all the prudence, and discretion we are capable of exerting.

The advantages of the circumstance before us in this respect are too many, and too apparent I think to escape your notice ; and it is not sufficient to say of it that it is the least liable to objections of almost any institution of this kind ; but that it seems not to be deficient in any one particular, requisite to an useful, and well conducted charity. In fact it is not so strictly Charity in the common acceptation of the word in our language, as the brotherly *love* so earnestly recommended by our savior in the text, in a more diffusive sense : *mercy and truth meet in it* ; private advantage and public utility run parallel ; and patriotism and benevolence *embrace each other*. With regard to individuals 'tis perhaps the most amiable, and affectionate manner in which we can possibly exert our love to our brethren ; there is nothing more abhorrent to human nature ; nothing which the generality of mankind seem to think so great an evil, as pain ; and health and vigor are I believe much oftener the subjects of envy, than even wealth and grandeur ; poverty itself seems on many accounts much less terrible ; but when they happen to meet together they must

must greatly aggravate the distresses of each other; in this situation what can be a nobler instance of humanity than to rescue the sufferer from a state of such complicated misery; to supply him at once with the means of health and of subsistence; and by this timely application to remove those anxieties from the mind, which are always very considerable, sometimes the principal impediments to a cure; and lastly, (and which is perhaps not the least important consideration) to deliver him from the merciless hands of those tolerated inquisitors, the common pretenders to physic and surgery in country towns, to whom the poorer sort of people are forced to apply; and to whose ignorance, and conceit the health, limbs, and even lives, of so many of our fellow creatures are continually sacrificed. With respect to the common-wealth sanity, and vigor pass to her in a great measure thro' the same channels; for as the persons, who apply for assistance from this institution consist chiefly of servants, artificers, laborers in husbandry, and in general from that class of subjects from which we recruit our armies, and our navies; while we are strengthening their hands we are in reality at the same time strengthening the hands of our country, and do not serve *them* more eminently by restoring them to themselves, than we do the community, by restoring to her some of her most necessary, and serviceable members.

members. It is worth remarking here, that in this choice of objects we are not so liable to be impos'd upon, as in many other instances; to have our benevolence abus'd, and our *labors of love* thrown away; indigence may be pretended, and even voluntary, and the effect of pride and idleness, as is I believe too commonly the case with respect to those wretches (the very bane of charity and pest of society) who run up and down the country under various pretences, block up our very doors, teize us at every corner, and often owe that indulgence and encouragement to their impudence and importunity, to which they have seldom any other plea in the world: but it is extremely difficult indeed, if not absolutely impossible, for the candidates for your benevolence in this case to be impostors: pain and distemper may 'tis true be fictitious, when they are only subjected to a momentary inspection as you pass the streets, and intended to extort a small and immediate contribution; but here neither the advantages arising from it (for a man in real health would submit I believe very reluctantly to the regimen, which would be necessarily enjoined him in consideration of his pretended disorder) nor the probability of escaping detection, and consequently both infamy and punishment, seem to suggest the least motive, or encouragement to the fraud: if there be a possibility of misapplication in any respect it

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seems

seems to arise from a sordid disposition in some, who may perhaps offer themselves as objects of this charity upon false pretences of inability to pay for their own cure; but even this objection, by the remarkable care and diligence which the proper officers constantly use in making the necessary enquiries, seems to be very sufficiently obviated. I believe you will not expect me to say any thing with regard to the management of this charity; the known and establish'd characters of those, who are principally concern'd in the execution and direction of it, must render every observation of this kind unnecessary, if not impertinent; and the accounts which are annually submitted to the public inspection will satisfy the most scrupulous, that it is in this respect also as irreprehensible as in the design itself.

Shall I need to use any incentives to engage you to contribute according to your respective abilities to the encouragement and promotion of such a design as this? Who can refuse it, and not stand self-condemn'd? Where there are so many strong and glaring characteristics of a truly christian love, it is not charity, it is not benevolence, but justice itself, which demands the support of it. Shall I have recourse to the trite and common arguments usually produced on these occasions, and observe to you how effectually

ally this love will recommend those, who distinguish themselves in the exertion of it both to God and men? that among the latter, nothing gives so sure and lasting a title to esteem as a benevolent spirit, which even those, who want a heart to emulate it, yet cannot forbear to approve, and commend? That from this class of men our grateful, though mistaken forefathers have selected their saints, their heroes, and their tutelary deities? That instances of beneficence which carry any thing singular in them, not only survive their authors, but are rarely ever forgot; that especial care is taken to continue the memory of them down to the latest posterity; that they become the exhaustless themes of panegyrics, the bases of statues, and are crown'd with memorials which shall expire then only, when time shall breathe his last in the arms of eternity? Shall I remind you, that with respect to God there is no instance of duty and obedience, which he has declar'd so acceptable to himself; none which he has more strongly enjoin'd, or more pathetically enforc'd? That he hath given repeated assurances that he will never forget the man who *considereth the poor and needy, never suffer him to be forsaken, nor his seed to be distressed?* That the glorious eulogy of *come ye blessed* is in a manner appropriated to those who thus exemplify the sincerity and measure of their love to their lord, by extending

tending it *to the least of these his brethren?* That lastly with respect to rewards here are such proposed as are adapted to every view; -- that he who pants after fame may purchase to himself an *everlasting remembrance*; he who is fond of riches may secure to himself *a treasure* which is not exposed to any hazards, which is not subject to decrease or decay, and which *neither rust nor moth shall be able to corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal?*

With respect to great part of my auditors I know this is unnecessary; and with regard to the rest, let me rather hope that they have already anticipated these reflections, and laid in their hearts that *good foundation* on which so vast a structure of present comfort and satisfaction, and of future joy and happiness, may be erected. Let it be sufficient to exhort the former *who have ministered unto their brethren, and yet do minister*, that they persevere in *their works and labor which proceedeth of love*, and be *not weary of well doing*; and to admonish the latter if they see any thing amiable in the example of these compassionate *Samaritans*, whose unreserved benevolence is of more acknowledg'd merit than the supercilious sanctity of the unpitying priest, or the partial bigotry of the unassisting *levite*, that they go immediately and *do likewise*.

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